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TO AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

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FOLLOWING REPEAT 012795 ACTION TUNIS 21 JAN

QUOTE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, TS, US

SUBJECT: TUNISIAN-LIBYAN MERGER IN U.S. PRESS

REF: TUNIS 323

1. MERGER WAS FRONT PAGE NEWS JAN 13 AND 14. MAJOR ITEMS INCLUDED IN AF PRESS CLIPS POUCHED TO YOU JAN 16.

2. THEREAFTER REPORTAGE SLIPPED TO INSIDE PAGES. WASHINGTON POST SERIES BY JONATHAN RANDAL OF SPECIAL NOTE. JAN 15 ARTICLE REPORTED MASMOUDI SAYING THAT PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA ATTRIBUTED HIS DISMISSAL TO HAVING ANGERED AMERICANS AND BEING UNWELCOME IN WHITE HOUSE. MASMOUDI SAID HE TOLD BOURGUIBA THIS WAS ANCIENT HISTORY AND THAT HIS PAST POLICY DIFFERENCES WITH U.S. WERE OFTEN MORE REGRETTED THAN RESENTED IN WASHINGTON. ARTICLE CITES U.S. EMBASSY SOURCES AS SAYING THAT AMBASSADOR SPENT 15 MINUTES WITH BOUGUIBA AT LATTER'S REQUEST AND THAT MINISTERIAL CHANGES

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NOT DISCUSSED. JAN 16 ARTICLE SEES MERGER AS DEAD FOR ALL

PRACTICAL PURPOSES WITH ANNOUNCEMENT BY PRIME MINISTER OF VARIOUS CONDITIONS. JAN 17 REPORT CONCENTRATES ON STATEMENTS BY NOUIRA AND CHATTI CALCULATED TO GRADUALLY BACK OFF FROM UNITY AND DEFUSE EMOTIONS.

3. ON JAN 18, WASHINGTON POST HEADLINES RANDAL STORY WITH "MERGER MISCUE HINTS UNFITNESS OF BOURGUIBA." RANDAL WRITES THAT "HIS FREQUENT TELEVISION APPEARANCES ARE A PAINFUL MOCKERY OF HIS RADIO SPEECHES YORE." AS EXAMPLES HE CITES, "HOW HE HAD TO MARRY HIS FIRST WIFE, A FRENCHWOMAN, WHEN SHE BECAME PREGNANT, MUCH TO HIS SURPRISE SINCE HE HAD THOUGHT HE WAS STERILE," AND, "HOW HE ORDERED RIVAL POLITICIAN SALAH BEN YOUSSEF ASSASSINATED." RANDAL ALSO QUOTES AN UNNAMED RECENT VISITOR TO THE PRESIDENT DESCRIBING HIS MENTAL AND CONVERSATIONAL LAPSES AND STATES THAT UNCERTAIN POLITICAL FUTURE RESULTING FROM BOURGUIBA'S DECLINE "HAS ENCOURAGED INFIGHTING AS THE WAR OF SUCCESSION SWEEPS NOW IN FAVOR OF ONE CLAN, NOW IN FAVOR OF ANOTHER."

4. IN NYT ARTICLE OF JAN 18, HENRY GINIGER REPORTS "AN INCREASE IN TENSION" IN TUNISIA WITH "HELMETED RIOT POLICEMEN" ON STREETS OF TUNIS. GINIGER SEES NOUIRA AND OTHER PROPONENTS OF DELAYING UNITY AS BEING IN CONTROL BUT "CONCERNED THAT AN ADVERSE REACTION BY STUDENTS AND OTHER LEFTISTS, ENCOURAGED BY THE LIBYANS, MIGHT LEAD TO UNREST." GINIGER DESCRIBES REFERENCES TO U.S. IN CONNECTION MASMOUDI OUSTER AS "EFFORT TO COVER UP THE POLITICAL STRUGGLE" SET OFF BY BOURGUIBA'S PRECIPITATE AGREEMENT TO UNITY SCHEME. "THERE WAS UNANIMOUS BELIEF IN TUNISIAN POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC CIRCLES THAT THIS PROBLEM AND NOT THE EVENTS OF 18 MONTHS AGO, LAY BEHIND THE FOREIGN MINISTER'S DOWNFALL. U.S. OFFICIALS ARE UNDERSTOOD TO HAVE DENIED THAT MASMOUDI WOULD BE UNWELCOME IN WASHINGTON."

5. NYT ARTICLE OF JAN 19 FEATURED NOUIRA AS FORESEEING NEGOTIATIONS WITH LIBYA TO SETTLE DIFFICULTIES IN WAY OF UNION. ARTICLE ALSO NOTES STATEMENT BY NOUIRA THAT FOUR TO FIVE MONTHS WOULD BE NECESSARY FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT PERMITTING REFERENDUM.

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6. WEEK'S PRESS COVERAGE CONCLUDED WITH LONG INTERPRETIVE ARTICLE BY JIM HOAGLAND IN OUTLOOK SECTION OF JAN 20 WASHINGTON POST. HOAGLAND FOCUSED ON PERSONALITY OF BOURGUIBA. "NOW IN THE TWILIGHT ZONE OF HIS FULL LIFE, HE SPENDS MORE AND MORE TIME SUNK IN REVERIE...." ON SUCCESSION ISSUE, HOAGLAND PREDICTS THAT STRONGEST CANDIDATES IN FREE ELECTION WOULD BE AHMED MESTIRI AND BAHY LADGHAM. REGARDING BOURGUIBA'S RATIONALE FOR MERGER, HOAGLAND DRAWS

ATTENTION TO SERIOUS UNEMPLOYMENT IN TUNISIA. EDITORIAL
IN NYT OF JAN 15 HAD MADE SIMILAR POINT BY NOTING THAT HOW-
EVER UNLIKELY ITS SUCCESS, MERGER HAD ECONOMIC LOGIC
JOINING "LIBYA'S EXCESSIVE OIL WEALTH WITH TUNISIA'S EXCES-
SIVE EDUCATED POPULATION, A COMBINATION THAT COULD ENABLE
A MERGED NATION TO ATTAIN LEVELS OF DEVELOPMENT AND IN-
FLUENCE THAT NEITHER COULD HOPE TO ACHIEVE ON ITS OWN."
7. STORY SEEMS TO BE DYING OUT AS NO RPT NO COVERAGE IN
MORNING PAPERS OF JAN 21. KISSINGER UNQUOTE KISSINGER

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